

14 July 2009

Ms Claire Moore
Chair
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

By E-mail: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator Moore

Re: Inquiry into Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related Bills

I write to express my concern about the above bills. I understand that these bills will enable Medicare funding, access to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and professional indemnity premium support for midwives providing care for women to give birth in hospital.

Medicare funding for midwifery care is long overdue. It is not acceptable however to exclude homebirth from this funding and indemnity arrangement. By doing this Australia is totally out of step with nations such as the United Kingdom, Canada, The Netherlands and New Zealand.

These nations support the rights of women to choose homebirth and fund a registered midwife through their national health scheme. In New Zealand and the U.K women have a legislative right to choose homebirth.

The intersection of this legislation with the national registration and accreditation of health professionals will prevent homebirth midwives from registering. I believe this to be an unintended consequence and ask that you take steps to include homebirth within the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) and related Bills.

I support a system where all consumers are treated equally, with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection.

I made an informed choice to birth my second child at home following a hospital birth for my first child. I made this decision to minimize birth intervention and to allow my child to be present at the birth. Homebirth is safe, gentle and family friendly. Homebirth was the right choice for my family.

In addition to the benefits of homebirth it is my opinion that an important principal is at stake if we ban women from birthing in the way of their choosing. If we force women to attend a hospital to birth their babies then what is next? Will we also move to a system of banning elective caesarean section? Banning inductions? Banning pain relief in labour? Choice in childbirth is a fundamental right which must not be lost unintentionally by poorly drafted legislation.

Even though homebirth is less common option in Australia (though the experience in other countries indicates that it would not be if publicly funded and widely available) women must still have the right to seek out and choose their own qualified medical care. Families such as mine who choose homebirth must have the same rights as any other family – choice of care, choice of practitioner, choice of location.

Yours sincerely

Rebecca Hamlet